



BY
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CHAPTER XV.

The Narrator.

MY, but I'm glad I've got you," Wilfred gushed. Lahoma. "Oh, how they are clashing along! Listen how the man is lashing his whip over those four horses. With we could see no man be grand tearing along at that pace."

The stage was rapidly coming up abreast of them, and Wilfred felt his grip tighten. There was a dash of lights, a glimpse of the driver's face as of creased leather as he raised his whip above his head, then noise and clasp of dust passed on and the lights became trailing spurs that in a minute or two the wind seemed to blow out.

"My poor, dear!" Lahoma wailed. "Do you think half like good enough care of himself from what I wrote in my letters? But no, he doesn't think Red Kimball is coming yet, for I didn't know it till after I'd written. It's with Bill now, waiting for another letter. Or for a telegram."

"No, not Lahoma," Wilfred tried to soothe her. "He has been hiding for days. Why should he come out just at the wrong time? You write that you'd send any more messages. Back will be on the lookout for him still. He is sure to be watching out for him."

"I know Brick," Lahoma protested, almost crying over the tears in the fatigues of her journey and the hopelessness of the situation. "I was afraid he wouldn't agree to meet at all, and just as soon as you run away and there wasn't any more prospects or no one, he'd get suspicious and the idea of staying away from home. Now in just over this minute, and all it will have when Red Kimball takes the switch after him?" Her voice quivered with distress.

"Don't be afraid, Lahoma," urged Wilfred, clasping her hand comfortingly about her. "Don't worry. I'll save Brick for you, and more."

"Well, I am in danger," said Lahoma, not venturing from her involuntary embrace. "Lucky for me the Brick is a Maypole young fellow, but no, I'm sure he wouldn't be willing to stay out in the prairie long after sunset—and during those cold nights for it is cold right now. We must hurry on, Wilfred."

"There's one comfort," said Wilfred as they reached their way toward the train. "Mr. Gledswire won't appear as a witness against Brick. Well get him cleared away enough."

"But Mr. Gledswire will support against him, and he'll swear anything that Red Kimball wants."

"I thought he agreed to no trial on condition that a certain pin—"

"Yes, but Red Kimball brought him that pin just before I left."

"Brought him the pin that Indians had?"

"Yes, the pearl and sapphire pin. And Mr. Gledswire seemed to consider it so important that I knew Red Kimball would never have given it up while he had it."

"Then—" Lahoma shuddered. "You see now what Red Kimball is, and you know how well he holds his own over Mr. Gledswire—can make him testify in such a way as to ruin my poor Brick. It struck him this held up and stand how important it is for him to live and never, never let himself be taken. But he thinks nobody could get the better of Red Feather. You see, if he just dreamed what has happened he'd know Mr. Gledswire can outwit him."

"We must reach Brick Wilkes before Red Kimball gets his warrant," explained Wilfred despondently.

"Yes, we must—we must!" Lahoma was growing slightly hysterical. "I won't mind any hardship, any danger, but what are we to do? You won't let me ride on alone, and you wouldn't be willing to leave me here and take the good horse yourself."

"You're quite right about that," returned the young man promptly. "We can only mount again and go as fast as my miscreant beast can travel, hoping for some chance to come our way. We have the advantage of not being on the stage, where Kimball could keep an eye on us."

"I ought to be more thankful for that than I am," Lahoma sighed. They mounted, but as they rode forward Wilfred's horse lagged more and more.

"It's slow sailing," Wilfred remarked, "but it will give us a chance to talk. By the way, do you feel ready for supper?" From his overcoat pocket he drew forth the sandwiches.

After they had eaten and the running sandwiches had been carefully stowed away in Wilfred's enormous pocket they pressed forward with renewed energy on the part of all save Wilfred's horse. By day or constant urging it was kept going faster than a walk, though it was besieged by a consuming desire to lie down. In order to keep Lahoma's mind from dwelling on their difficulties and on Brick's peril the young man maintained conversation at high pressure, only seconded by his companion, who was anxious to show herself undivided.

"During my long winters on my quarter section, nobody in sight—just the prairie and me—I studied out a good many things, just thinking about Oklahoma and—"

Lahoma said softly, "I know there was something else you thought about."

and find out what's the matter. "Besides, you said—you know you said, when we were strolling—that I didn't understand such matters and that you'd tell me what it was time."

"It's time now, Lahoma—time for you to be somebody's sweetheart—and you said—you know you said, when we were strolling—that I'd tell the till for you."

"But I brought up the subject myself, and I mean to clear it right short off, for it's a man subject. Oh, how terrible this house is!"

"Well, what is it?"

"I just wanted to say your name," he started again. "It sounds good to me."

"Yes, it stands for Oklahoma."

"It sounds much more than that!" he called.

"Yes," she persisted in maddeningly teasing him. "Something big and grand."

"Not an out," he cried, now at some distance, "but what there's room for more than Brick and Bill in the room!"

"If she answered the wind drawled not words. With extended arms he groped along the track with exceeding caution. Suddenly his foot touched an object which, on examination proved to be a human body, a gaping wound in its breast.

"Found anything?" called Lahoma, her voice shrilling.

He rose quickly and almost stumbled over another victim. It was a second body stiffened to death.

"Is he there in a minute?" he called, his voice grave and steady. After a brief pause he added, "I've found one of the horses. It's dead."

"Oh, why?" she exclaimed. "They've driven it to death."

"Wilfred and I found a bullet hole in his ear, but he was nothing."

Suddenly the horse held by Lahoma gave a plunge, broken away and went galloping back over the trail they had reversed, pursued by Lahoma's cry of dismay. "I couldn't hold him," she gasped. "He lifted me clear off the ground."

Wilfred was also disconcerted, but his possession of arms on his full way disengaged him, starting a severe argument for which their condition of fear no foundation. But his forced consciousness suddenly caused him to realize again that his extended hand struck nothing but earth when.

"Lahoma, there's the situation. It's standing but we can't tell if fast; except for the crowd that has come to inspect the horses. Let's bring the Indians. This is a good place for them to stop and supplies are on and on, turned suddenly backward against the scene which was once a broad, quiet life-field."

The prospect of a massacre in the black lands of the Indians appalled him, but even worse racing that possibility was the thought with Lahoma's lips again "second pin?" Lahoma had never occurred to her that Amadee had survived from the pitiful scene, now that she saw also who was the process—most enterprising of all in India. Lahoma did not suppose of animals. Why should any want to risk so much trouble for a pin?"

"Second pin?" he ordered. "Thank God, we're bound something that we can get back off." "That's it either all or nothing," she said, "and nothing but death for the horses and men jumped on the iron track. But I wonder what became of the driver?"

"The stagecoach?" she murmured, looking toward him. "Or Wilfred? I guess what's happened. One of the horses stopped dead, and Red Kimball and men jumped on the iron track. But I wonder what became of the driver?"

"Get inside!" he ordered. "Thank God, we're bound something that we can get back off." "That's it either all or nothing," she said, "and nothing but death for the horses and men jumped on the iron track. But I wonder what became of the driver?"

"Get inside!" said the young man sharply. "There's a lot of noise above the ground through the windows. You Wilfred" she explained, looking and nearly sobbing, "will notice Red Kimball and men jumping on the iron track. But I wonder what became of the driver?"

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was apparently but half awake. Not a muscle moved as she looked into his face. "I thought," she murmured, "it was on account of Annabel."

"I went away because I loved you—because you're good to me."

"I promised Brick."

"Wilfred hurried after a fresh horse to carry him at once to the cave, ten miles away. Warning must be given to Brick Wilkes first of all Lahoma even had a wild hope that Brick might devise some means whereby he could attend the wedding without danger of arrest, but to Wilfred this seemed impossible.

He had gone but a few steps from the hotel when he came face to face with the sheriff of Greer county. Cutting short his old friend's outburst of pleasure,

"Look here, Mizzen," said Wilfred, drawing him aside from the curious throng on the sidewalk. "Have you got a grudge against Brick Wilkes?"

"Mizzen tapped his breast. "Here?"

"Wilfred sighed with relief. "At any rate, you don't," he cried.

"No use riding over to the cave," remarked his friend, with a grin. "That is, unless you want to call on some friends of mine—deputies. They're living in the dugout, just laying in smoke."

"Wilfred explained that he had just come to town.

"But Mizzen," expostulated Wilfred, "why are you taking so much trouble against my best friend?" The warrant ought to be enough and if you can't get a chance to serve it on him that's not your fault. Your deputies haven't got right in that cave, and I'm going to smoke 'em out."

Mizzen chewed with a deprecating shake of his head. "See here, old tap," he murmured, "don't say nothing about using Brick Wilkes' friend. The whole country is against him. Heard of them three bodies?"

Wilfred explained that he had just come to town.

"Well, good Lord, then the pleasure

is going to have in telling you something you don't know and something that's full of meat! Let's go where we can sit down—this isn't no smoking